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# TOWN OF AMHERST

## MASTER PLAN

1998



*Prepared by the*  
**AMHERST PLANNING BOARD**

*With the assistance of the*



**NASHUA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**

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**MASTER PLAN**

**1998**

*Adopted February 25, 1998*

*Prepared by the*

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## **CHAPTER I:**

### ***Executive Summary***



## CHAPTER I: *Executive Summary*

Amherst's last master plan was adopted in 1986. Since this time, the Town has grown considerably and there is a need to update figures, maps and inventories. No major changes to future land use patterns are being proposed at this time. The Amherst Planning Board contracted with the Nashua Regional Planning Commission to update the Population and Housing, Land Use, Community Facilities and Transportation Sections. The Environmental Resources chapter was updated by the Conservation Commission with the assistance of the Nashua Regional Planning Commission. All other chapters that have not been updated remain in full force and effect.

On January 9 and 10, 1998, the Town of Amherst conducted a "Community Profile" process with the UNH Extension Service. Approximately 100 guests turned out at the event to determine the Town's most critical issues, and to develop strategies to implement them. While numerous suggestions were offered, consensus was achieved on the five most critical:

1. ***Conservation Strategy.*** A conservation strategy should focus on both the aesthetic and fiscal benefits of a publicly funded conservation effort. It was recommended that the Town explore issuing a twenty-year bond to acquire the 100 best building sites. Amherst is growing at a rapid rate. Since 1991, over 400 units of new housing have been permitted. This plan estimates that there are between 750 and 1,350 new housing units that could be built in the residential zones of the Town. At Amherst's 1990 rate of 3.03 persons per household, this could translate into an additional 2,273 to 4,091 new residents at build-out. The long term impacts of these new households should be considered when determining the fiscal benefits of the conservation program.
2. ***Communications Plan.*** A key recommendation of the process was the establishment of a communications plan. The plan should explore developing methods of widely distributing information to the public through the use of electronic, print and verbal communications, including the internet and cable television access.
3. ***Business Development.*** A business development planning committee should be established to examine the needs of existing, emerging and future businesses. A process of inventorying existing businesses and space should be developed initially, followed by strategies for promoting and attracting new businesses. Benefits to the tax base should also be explored.
4. ***Community Center at Brick School.*** More public activity is desired in the Town Center. The possibility of enabling the utilization of the Brick School for a coffeehouse, movie house or other similar gathering place should be explored.
5. ***Arts Council.*** An art's council should work in conjunction with the library to stage cultural events, such as a jazz festival on the Town Green. Such events will have the effect of drawing more of the public to Amherst's beautiful historic center.

This master plan update reinforces these goals and establishes the following recommendations by chapter.

## ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

### *Open Space*

1. The Town should expand its efforts to preserve and protect open space parcels as they become available through the purchase of development rights, easements or fee purchases.
2. A conservation restriction should be placed on parcels of land that become town-owned through failure of the owner to pay taxes when appropriate. The Board of Selectmen should assign management of the properties to the Conservation Commission when applicable.
3. Raise the allocation of Current Use recovery money from the present 50% for fee purchases by the Conservation Commission. This action will require Town Meeting approval.
4. Illustrate the financial advantages to landowners of selling their property to the Commission and exemplify the special sense of donation to their community by selling land to the Conservation Commission.
5. To obtain grants to benefit conservation, land rights acquisition and community recreation, the Town needs to develop a purposeful mechanism to identify grant sources, match them to needs, establish priorities and perfect an aggressive application process.
6. Residents desiring to preserve the open space character of their town should be able to find encouragement and support from town agencies and in town policies.

### *Contiguous Lands*

1. The open space fraction of one subdivided parcel should be engineered/ designed to abut that of an adjoining subdivision or other protected open space.
2. Developers should be encouraged to provide as much buffering as possible beyond the ordinance requirements.
3. Support acquisition of contiguous parcels as a strategy to protect open space.

### *Greenways*

1. Incorporate the concepts and objectives of the greenways section of this plan.
2. Amherst officials should work with their counterparts in Merrimack to establish a Pond Parish Corridor as a protected resource approaching 1,000 acres in area.

### *Forest Management*

1. Pursue forest management in Town owned lands with the strategy of enhancing wildlife habitat as well as income, according to the details in the Town Forest Management Plan.
2. Plan to provide replacement trees in residential areas and the village center in particular.

### *Baboosic Lake Watershed*

1. Amherst town officials should continue to monitor unauthorized conversion of seasonal cottages into year-round residences.
2. Inform all residents within the Shorelands Protection Zone of regulations that apply to them - fertilizer usage, tree cutting, etc.
3. Conduct detailed sanitary survey of first tier homes and cottages for failing septic systems.
4. The Town should consider a program to require annual pumping of all septic systems on non-conforming lots in the lake watershed. Require proof of pumping with payment of town taxes. Work with Merrimack to explore possibilities of sewer installation.
5. Support the efforts of the Baboosic Lake Association especially for phosphorus use reduction.
6. Support lay monitoring of lake water and provide means to educate public about water quality.

### *Witches Brook, Stump Pond, Pennichuck Watershed*

1. Include Pennichuck Water Works engineers in the site plan review process for properties in its watershed, especially Stump Pond and the 101A corridor.
2. Develop an education program to inform the general public about the watershed, the impacts of bacteria and nutrients on water quality and to demonstrate the benefits of reducing bacteria and nutrient loading.
3. Conduct a sanitary survey of the entire watershed to identify faulty and failed septic systems, and illicit discharges.

### *Prime Wetlands*

1. Establishing the Stump Pond and Ponemah Bog areas a Prime Wetland.

### *Amherst Portion of New Boston Air Force Station*

1. Work with Air Force officials to make the Amherst land in the low security area of the New Boston Air Force Station available for unsupervised passive recreation.
2. Make plans, contacts, forms, etc. to be able to act immediately if the Amherst section of the New Boston Air Force Station becomes available.

### *Curtis Wellhead Protection District*

1. Cooperate with Milford in establishing a well head protection district for the Curtis wells.
2. Educate people in this zone about their responsibility to protect public water.

### *Pond Parish Area*

1. The wetlands and ponded areas either side of Pond Parish Road should be included with Great Meadow and Ponemah Bog as Areas of Environmental Concern.

### *Major Public Water Bodies*

1. Implement the standards of the Comprehensive Shorelands Protection Act (RSA 483-B) which became fully effective on July 1 1994, to protect and conserve the following qualifying public water bodies; Baboosic Lake, Little Baboosic Lake, Damon Pond, Joe English Pond, Lincoln Pond, Honey Pot Pond, Stump Pond and the Souhegan River.

### *Aquifer*

1. Provide sewers in commercially and industrially zoned areas of the aquifer along 101A.
2. Monitoring wells should be established in the bedrock aquifers to track recharge and discharge levels, and to provide information for future planning.

### *Town-wide*

1. Replace the High Intensity Soil Survey (HISS) standards in the Subdivision and Site Plan Regulations to require the use of the Site Specific Soil Standards for future applications.
2. Amend the zoning ordinance to exclude parking lots from the woodland buffer zone.
3. Evaluate the existing wetlands regulations and recommend changes; i.e., require that a 25 foot non-disturbance area be maintained within the 50 foot structure setback.
4. Incorporate requirements for the use of structural best management practices (BMPs) to capture and treat stormwater before discharging it into a tributary or water body.
5. Continue the role of advocate of quality environmental education programs.

### *Joint/Combined Operations*

1. A joint subcommittee of the Recreation and Conservation Commissions should be empowered to manage town-owned properties on which both conservation and recreation activities are permitted. Town officials should actively pursue policies and programs which will compliment conservation and passive recreation activities with their counterparts in adjoining towns.

## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

1. Capital needs of each department head should be assessed and monitored on a regular basis so that the Town may continue to provide high quality services to its residents.

2. The Town should begin to discuss plans for a future expansion which would include adequate office space for libraries, shelf space for increased volumes, and the latest adaptations for information technology.
3. The Town should expend the necessary dollars to cover the staff and funds needed to develop the following: an additional three small playgrounds equipped with play areas and recreational equipment for toddlers and young children; two large playgrounds that contain an additional six tennis courts; a swimming pool; a senior center/cultural center that includes an activities room, an art room and equipment for cultural and recreational activities; and one very large area containing trails, boating access, and additional play fields.
4. More educational classroom space is needed. The Town and School Board should continue to examine and evaluate student population growth in order to plan for a long term expansion project which will provide for school populations into the 21st century.
5. The Bon Terrain area is not sewerred, which may be hindering the desired growth of the Town's industrial base. Amherst should continue its efforts to cooperate with Milford and/or Nashua to extend sewer lines to these areas.
6. The Town should develop a Capital Improvements Program. The purpose of this program is to evaluate the capital investment needs of the town to ensure that town owned property is maintained adequately, that new construction or expansions of existing capital facilities are planned for in a manner that best utilizes scarce tax dollars.

## TRANSPORTATION

1. Continue to use the level of service standards previously adopted for evaluating the traffic impacts of new development. Level of service "C" is established as the acceptable standard for all officially designated scenic roads and all other roads within the Historic District. Level of service D is the acceptable standard for non-scenic roads outside of the Historic District.
2. The Town should continue to use the Road Surface Management System for inventorying its roadway pavement conditions and developing future repair strategies.
3. In order to maintain safe and convenient access to roads and highways, the Town should adhere to NH RSA 236:13 to select the safest possible access to roads and ensure adequate drainage and grades. For all access points AASHTO standards for minimal safe sight distance should be applied.
4. A right-of-way (ROW) width of forty-five feet (minimum) is recommended for all local roads in town, with the exception of private ways and drives, to allow potential future upgrading of any roadway.
5. To the extent that new development projects create a need for improvements, developers should be required to pay their proportion of the cost to implement these improvements. The Town should form a policy to control and guide future developments along Class VI roads. In principle, developments along Class VI roads should be disallowed.

6. Cul-de-sacs should be discouraged in the following circumstances: where it would be traverse into a predominantly non-residential zone; when it would produce a dangerous intersection; where it comes off of an existing cul-de-sac; or when natural features such as steep slopes or major wetlands exist.
7. The Town should continue to review and revise, as necessary, its Emergency Operations Plan, which details the specific responsibilities of various departments and agencies, and their appropriate course(s) of action for a wide variety of crises.
8. The Town should work with the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) to implement the Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, which calls for primarily using the existing street system for non-motorized transportation through the provision of four-foot bicycle lanes and installing five-foot sidewalks on both sides of arterial roads where possible. The Town should adopt land use strategies which facilitate non-motorized travel, such as encouraging mixed-use development.
9. Route 101A - Although the NHDOT had previously programmed a Route 101A Bypass into the Ten-Year Transportation Plan, that project has been modified to an upgrade of the existing Route 101A. The Town should work with the NHDOT and other Route 101A corridor communities to develop a long-range improvement strategy which could include any of the following: 1) consolidation of driveway access and construction of parallel frontage roads; 2) construction of a park-and-ride lot on Route 101A; 3) extension of the center median and provision of additional jug-handles in order to consolidate left-turn activity; 4) provide additional turn and/or through lanes at intersections; 5) provide additional travel lanes along deficient corridor segments.
10. Route 101 - NRPC is conducting a study of the Route 101A corridor. Recommendations will be developed for the corridor segment through Amherst by NRPC in cooperation with town officials. These should be incorporated into future Master Plan updates.

## LAND USE

1. The current land use districts found within the Town of Amherst, as well as dimensional and density requirements, have been in place for a number of years and are adequately serving the community. While minor modifications will be necessary, such modifications should be determined on a case-by-case basis and evaluated each year.
2. The Planning Board should continue to address the issue of highway access management for commercial developments on state roadways. Highway access management consists of strategies for preserving the capacity of existing roadway systems by the use of curb cut controls, shared access roads and other similar mechanisms. Access management will ensure that roadway capacity is preserved which will reduce the need for road widening projects.
3. Issues concerning water quality are of paramount concern to the Town. Future regulations and development reviews need to continue to evaluate the hydrologic impacts of development, and should encompass issues related to nitrogen loading, pesticide loading, road salt analysis and erosion control. For projects with the greatest impacts, a program of on going water quality analysis should be required.

4. Open space protection should be a major factor for high-density developments. Areas to be protected should not be those that are simply unbuildable, but those that have significance for recreation, resource protection or viewshed protection.
5. Recommendations made in the Environmental Resources Chapter of this plan that have implications for current zoning should be reviewed by the Planning Board and considered for future zoning amendments.

#205A-1